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UNCLAS VATICAN 000551

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/WE LARREA; NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [VT](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL: HOLY SEE CITES PROBLEMS FOR PILGRIMS

[1](#)1. (U) This telegram contains an action request. Please see paragraph 3.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Holy See MFA Country Director for Israel Monsignor Franco Coppola raised the Vatican's concerns about freedom of movement for pilgrims to Bethlehem December 5. Coppola claimed that while people staying in Jerusalem could easily leave the city to go to Bethlehem, there were often interminable delays when trying to reenter Jerusalem. He said that under the current circumstances pilgrims with hotel rooms in Jerusalem would find it difficult to make a day trip to Bethlehem and make it back for the night. Coppola said he understood that security was important, but wondered if more personnel could be added to checkpoints to make travel more feasible. He noted the upcoming Christmas season would only increase the number of people wishing to visit Bethlehem.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Though we understand the Holy See is raising this point directly with the government of Israel, Post would appreciate any information Department or ConGen Jerusalem has on this issue so that we can relay it to the Vatican MFA. We are keeping the Holy See informed of the Department's statements supporting freedom of movement and access.
ROONEY

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2005VATICA00551 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED